

BLACK WORKERS FOR JUSTICE STATEMENT ON THE WCAR
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Durban Is Our Seattle

People of Color Resist Globalization by Fighting Racism

The UN in Perspective

Thousands of African Americans, People of African Descent and People of Color representing various social movements, people's organizations and non governmental organizations from around the world are converging in Durban, South Africa this week for the United Nations (UN) sponsored World Conference Against Racism (WCAR).

The people's hope is to influence, strategize, and set the stage for the next decades of struggle against all forms of racist oppression and discrimination throughout the world.

In the early 1960s when Malcolm X called on African Americans to take our struggle against US racist oppression to the "World Court", he was referring to the United Nations (UN). Malcolm had great

hopes that the newly independent countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America would be important allies within the UN to help condemn and challenge the racist US treatment of African Americans and Peoples of Color throughout the world.

However, the major institutions of global capitalism (imperialism) like the World Trade Organization (WTO), which unite the big industrial countries and multinational corporations, are using their wealth and military power to restrict the democ-

The WCAR offers African Americans an important opportunity and creates a framework to place our demands against oppression within the proper context of the international development of global capitalism and its oppression of nations, peoples, women, and workers worldwide.



Panel of women leaders from the U.S. South, Mexico, and Australia discuss globalization and women's oppression at the Second Southern International Workers School convened at Morehouse College, Atlanta, GA., USA.

atic decision making of nations (self-determination) to decide on just trade and development policies. This has served to weaken and undermine the basic role and mission of the UN as outlined in the various UN charters.

We must therefore recognize the limitations of the UN. However, it is very important to demand that the UN act as an international democratic world governing body that mandates and enforces policies of human rights, respect for self-determination and redress for crimes against humanity.

The United Front, Reparations, and the People's Struggles

The US government is taking the position that the concerns raised by African Americans about racist oppression are solely an internal US question. That is, a question removed from the jurisdiction of the UN and other international bodies responsible for rendering judgments and concrete forms of international intervention.

The massive protests against the WTO summits in Seat-

tle and Washington, DC points out the important role of an internal US movement against globalization in helping to expose, isolate and constrain the leading role played by the US government in driving and reinforcing the racist policies causing global oppression.

Moreover, it is important that People of African descent engage each other and other Peoples of Color in working out common strategies to combat these policies.

Malcolm X urged African Americans to have a united front when appealing to the UN and international arena.

The demand for reparations provides the main basis for the anti-racist US and international united front against global capitalism. It makes a direct challenge to global capitalism by calling for a major redistribution of the accumulated wealth of governments and corporations who profited from the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade.

However, it is vitally important that the African American and People of Color united front at the WCAR also promote and build international support for critical struggles and issues reflecting the sharpest attacks by the US system on the lives and social movements of the masses. These attacks clearly demonstrate that the U.S. is rapidly moving in the direction of fascism.

The US government frame-up and campaign to execute Mumia Abu-Jamal; the massive assaults and murders by police throughout the US on Blacks and Latino/a's; the violent 1999 police assault ordered by the state of South Carolina on the Charleston

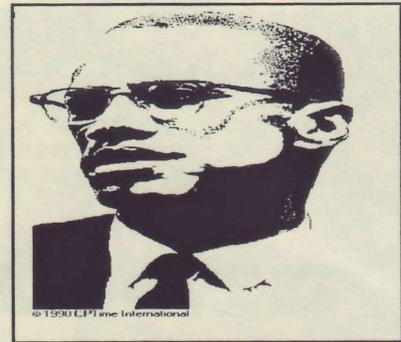
Dockworkers Union; the attacks and legal restrictions against rights for immigrant workers; and the flagrant disenfranchisement of African American voters are some of the most immediate campaigns needing international support. ***The demand to end the US embargo against Cuba, and the dismantling of NAFTA and GATT, must also be raised by the US delegation.***

These attacks seek to make African Americans and People of Color the scapegoats for crises caused by the corporate

A strong statement and action on the part of an African American and People of Color led US delegation with support from international participants, is therefore needed in Durban, South Africa, to protest the attempt by the US government to use its threat of a boycott and lack of overall material support for the holding of the WCAR, to pressure the conveners to remove language condemning slavery and Zionism from the WCAR platform statements.

restructuring of the global economy. In addition to sharpening divisions between white and non-white workers, this racist push also aims to encourage tensions, antagonisms and violent interactions among the oppressed Peoples of Color themselves.

It is important to point out the historic and current role of the US South in promoting racism. Likewise, we should raise the strategic significance of having strong African American working class community and workplace led struggles and organizations in the South. We must speak out strongly against women's oppression and the system of patriarchy as an oppressive and strategic pillar of global capitalism; and we



must oppose homophobia as divisive and oppressive.

International Solidarity and Globalization

There are differences within the African American NGOs and mass organizations about the participation of our contingent in solidarity actions led by the South African masses in opposition to the corporate global policies in their country. For example, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), a labor federation representing close to two million workers, is calling for a two-day general strike in opposition to the privatization policies proposed or being implemented by the South African government.

Some heads of old line US civil rights organizations are opposed to African Americans participating in activities expressing support for the COSATU proposed strikes. These leaders state that such actions would embarrass the Black-led South African government. Some have even suggested holding a pro-South African government march in Durban during the time of the WCAR to counter any misgivings about the African American support for the current South African government.

COSATU, one of the three main mass organizations responsible for the establishment of the ANC led government, defines its strike against privatization as being consistent with the goals that guided the

struggle to defeat Apartheid and to build a new and more democratic South Africa.

"We have always called for the transformation of the state. We inherited government structures designed to serve a [white] minority and oppress the [Black] majority. We need new systems to extend quality services to black communities, establish participatory democracy in all spheres of government, and drive economic development."

COSATU believes that the ongoing post Apartheid process of social transformation must not only be state driven but it must also be people driven. That is, that there

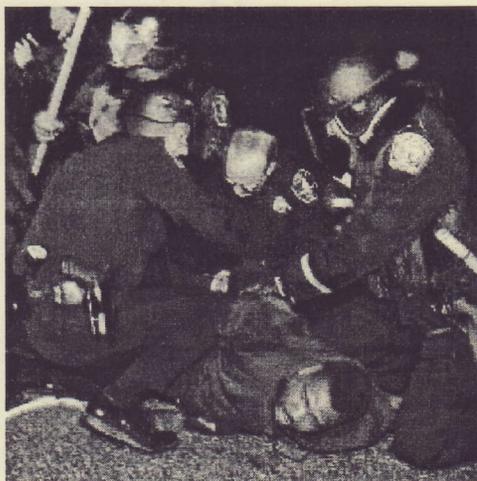
must be a direct role played by the mass peoples organizations in influencing and shaping public policies. *We are therefore duty bound while in South Africa, to support the legitimate mass actions of the South African people in resisting the policies of globalization.*

The Call for a Radical National Program of Action

The WCAR informs us that ongoing involvement of African Americans in the international arena requires a widely represented and mass based democratic national framework and a comprehensive and radical na-

tional program such as the Black Radical Congress *Freedom Agenda*. Such a program must reflect the national self-determination and unifying strategic demands and priorities that emphasize radical change in the conditions of the African American working masses. No one African American organization or political tendency can build such a congress. **It requires a united front effort of the most active Black liberation organizations and individuals in reaching out broadly to link and incorporate the mass struggles into a unity process.**

Dock Workers Unite! Drop The Charges! Free the Charleston Five! Organize The South!



Charleston, South Carolina, USA: In January 2000 six (600) hundred riot clad police from the state of South Carolina rioted against 150 peacefully picketing dock workers at the Port of Charleston. The riot police were fully equipped with attack dogs, helicopters, off shore gun boats, snipers, horses and armored vehicles.

The dock workers were members of the International Longshoremen's Association, Locals 1422 and 1771. The 900

member Local 1422 is a black local with a long history of activism in the Charleston area community. Most recently the Local's leadership played an upfront and active role in organizing with South Carolina's Black community against the historic and daily raising of the white supremacist confederate flag to the top of the state capital building.

Locals 1422 and 1771 (Checkers and Clerks) were picketing on the docks against the intended use of non-union labor by a Dutch stevedoring company, WSI and a main shipping line, Nordana. Twelve workers were injured during the melee, including 1422 president Ken Riley.

In the aftermath of the attack, the state immediately moved to accuse the workers of starting the riot and arrested eight (8) on trumped up charges. When those charges were dismissed in local court, the state attorney general Charlie Condon, a republican conservative, drew grand jury indictments for felony

rioting against five (5) workers. Four of the five are black. The five have been held under "house arrest" since January of 2000, nearly two years! Moreover, WSI, the stevedoring company has filed a \$1.5 million civil suit against both locals for alleged financial losses caused by the picketing. Twenty-seven (27) members of 1422 and 1771 are named in the civil action.

"Right-to-Work"

Not frequently discussed but centrally at issue was the use of the South Carolina "right-to-work" law by Charlie Condon to initially charge the workers with violating right-to-work statutes. The Taft-Hartley Section 14(b) law, commonly known as "right-to-work" was passed in South Carolina in 1954. Between 1944 and 1976, every southern state and several western and northwestern states passed the "right-to-work" laws. The law was initiated by big business to prevent the growth and development of trade unions in the South particularly

and prevents the consolidation of "closed shops" or full membership requirements in a democratically elected union.

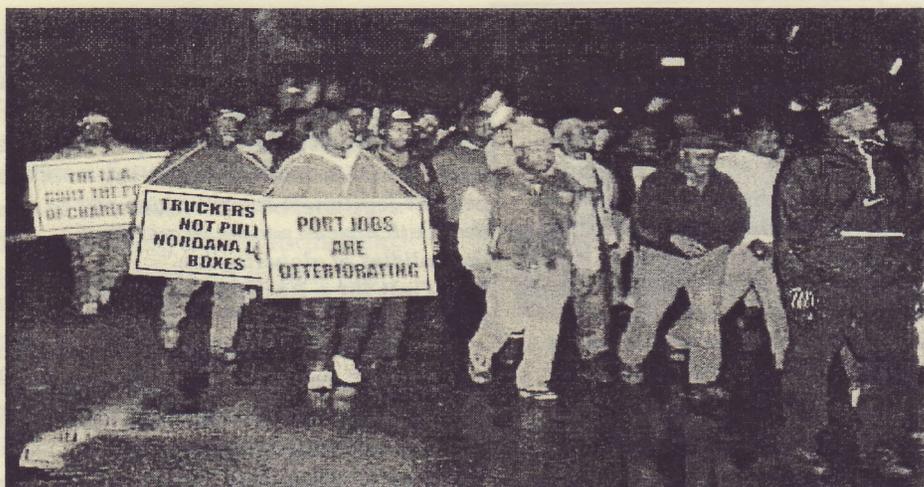
"Right-to-Work" was also aimed at further consolidating the "jim crow" apartheid South's power to combat the growing movement against segregation in the South which might have unified the trade union and civil rights movement in its early stages of development.

Condon has openly stated that the state of South Carolina will vigorously fight the growth of trade unions. North and South Carolina have the lowest rates of unionization in the U.S. ---- less than 6 and 4 percent respectively.

The Defense Campaign

The significance of the Charleston Five campaign cannot be overstated. It represents the struggle of Black workers to protect their jobs and the right to maintain union jobs in the anti-union South. It demonstrates the vicious, racist political climate in US society where Black people and other people of color are frequently attacked, beaten, and murdered by state sanctioned police violence. The heinous murder of Amadou Diallo and Teisha Miller and the savage police attack against Abner Luima echo in the police riot against the Charleston dock workers. Moreover, the struggle brings another of the neo-liberal strategies of globalization to defeat and weaken labor unions while forcing wages down to the ports of the US South. Finally, the struggle poses the challenge to US labor that so-called "right-to-work" laws in the South must be overturned.

Initiated by leaders of the Black Radical Congress and the renowned west coast International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), a defense effort was launched to support the Charleston Five struggle. In the last year the defense campaign has grown tremendously nationwide and internationally. A national organizing committee was established in South Carolina comprised of organizers and leaders from the South Carolina State AFL-CIO to the SC based Progressive Network, leaders of the Black Radical Congress, ILWU organizers, and oth-



ers.

A national speaking tour has been launched and President Ken Riley of ILA Local 1422 has conducted a broad national educational campaign on the facts and scope of the struggle. A defense fund has been launched which has raised thousands to support the workers. More financial support is needed. And defense committees from Oakland, California, to Atlanta, Georgia, to New York have been established across the country.

Defense campaign strategy has been debated by various organizations nationally. One view, expressed by AFL-CIO organizers nationally has been that the racism evident in the attack on the dockworkers should not be drawn out as a front line issue among the local union and central labor council affiliates of the AFL-CIO. By raising the question of racism, they have argued, white workers are alienated and are more hesitant to support the struggle. They argue that the attack on labor should be the main feature of the defense campaign among their affiliates.

Another view expressed by organizations such as the Black Radical Congress and the Black Workers For Justice has been that there should be no "either/or" approach to this struggle. That in fact, the question of race can not be separated from the labor question as these are primarily Black workers in the South who are under attack by the State of South Carolina.

International Solidarity

The ILWU has called for a shut down of all ports along the west coast of the USA on the first day of the trial for the Charleston Five. The Spain based International Dockers Council (IDC) has also joined in to support the call for a Port shut down. Ports are expected to shut down along the US west coast, in Europe, and in other parts of the world.

The International Day of Solidarity with the Charleston Five has become an international out cry and plan of action to defeat the forces of globalization on ports throughout the world.

The trial is expected to take place this fall, possibly as early as the end of September 2001. To join the movement for the International Day of Solidarity contact ILA Local 1422 at 843-723-2774. Or write to the Campaign for Workers Rights in South Carolina, PO Box 21777 Charleston, South Carolina, 29413. To contribute to the defense fund forward to Dockworkers Defense Fund, 910 Morrison Drive, Charleston, SC 29403, attention: Robert J. Ford.